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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: priority theme: social services for all

Statement submitted by the International Association of Schools of Social Work, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) represents 1,700 schools of social work in 100 countries that collectively educate the vast number of social workers needed to meet the social service challenges of the twenty-first century. Even countries that have never supported social work education in the past, today recognize its importance to the advancement of their people and are engaged in developing undergraduate and master's level social work programmes.

IASSW enthusiastically applauds the emphasis of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on social services as essential to life, and endorses the six basic social services for all that emerged from the World Summit for Social Development's Programme of Action: (1) population (with special emphasis on reproductive health and family planning services); (2) primary "preventive and curative" health care (which we maintain should be defined as both physical and mental health care); (3) nutrition; (4) basic education; (5) drinking water and sanitation; and (6) shelter. When countries are pressed economically, social conditions predictably deteriorate. Therefore, we urge member States to enhance such services.

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Social workers are uniquely educated to provide comprehensive social services to individuals, groups, families, organizations and communities in both rural and urban areas. The problems of those who suffer from poverty, violence, discrimination, and other social injustices are challenges that social workers are trained to address. The IASSW urges Governments to provide resources for innovations in social work research and education to ensure that social workers in all countries have up-to-date training in international social development and services.

When planning and implementing effective social services, IASSW emphasizes the importance of addressing the needs of those most likely to experience the problem being addressed now, as well as those populations in which the problem is increasing most rapidly. The promotion of "preventive and curative health care", therefore, must target the populations at highest risk, that is, women, children, the elderly, refugees and minorities.

Supporting the United Nations concept of gathering gender-specific information, called "gender mainstreaming" is key to understanding the social service needs of all people. Physical and mental health problems are derived largely from violence, poverty and cultural subservience. Health and welfare needs often are polarized with few resources to support systems of community-based care, and those that exist are often considered unresponsive to gender-specific cultural differences. We urge Governments to provide resources to educate social workers for gender-specific culturally relevant community-based services, as well as evaluative studies that address critical social conditions from a human rights perspective.

Social work by definition is an interdisciplinary profession that educates its members to work collaboratively, honouring other disciplines and working with people from all walks of life. We urge member States to provide funds to further the social work professions' interdisciplinary functioning in the interest of developing community-based infrastructures for comprehensive, effective social services for all.